

The Southern Frontier

We dedicate ourselves to the task of doing the most and the best that can be done here and now.

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THE ABBEVILLE CASE*

ELEANOR GRAHAM NICHOLS

Since September 1944 there has developed in Alabama a strain on Negro-white relationships which has received national attention. It has grown out of the "Abbeville case," the rape of a Negro woman by white youths. Numbers of organizations, among them the Southern Regional Council and the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, and countless newspapers and individuals have concerned themselves with this case. A "Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor" has been established with headquarters in New York City, and an Alabama committee of similar nature is being formed.

Numbers of southerners believe that justice has been thwarted in this case. The reasons given are many and varied. Some claim it is solely because the victim is a Negro. Others feel it is because it has been impossible for her to identify her attackers. It has also been suggested that she has "sold out." Some are convinced that a technicality of legal procedure is all that has throttled the operations of the law. In reality, the Abbeville case is a tangled complex of most of these factors.

Southern Sensitiveness

Reports published by various groups have contained discrepancies which, though of minor character, have added greatly to the confusion. Resentment against "outside interference," particularly from the north, has created an undercurrent of tension which may by now have rendered the problem incapable of solution. It is difficult to distill the truth from a situation which quickly became complicated by racial animosities, sectional pride, and an air of censure and superiority on the part of some outside agencies of allegedly radical nature.

Southerners, even the most liberal, are sensitive to criticism from above the Mason and Dixon line. In part, this is because there has been too much criticism and so little commendation. In part, it is because southerners cannot but be aware of many instances of social injustice in the north. They feel that the north has enough problems of its own to engage the concern of socially conscious individuals and groups there. But more than from either of these causes, their sensitiveness arises from the feeling that the south has more socially alert people and organizations to grapple with its problems than it is ever credited with having. The south is weary of being

looked upon as *the* problem child of the nation and as having no interest in solving its own social riddles. In spite of grievous sins, the south not only wants to but can deal with its own injustices; and it not only can but has, to an admirable degree. That, however, is another story.

The Case Examined

With all this in mind several organizations and many individuals have examined the Abbeville case in order to see what Alabamans might do to remove the stigma it has brought upon the state. As conference secretary of Christian social relations in the Woman's Society of Christian Service of the Alabama Methodist conference, I was asked by the Southern Regional Council and my jurisdictional superior to investigate the incident. A trip to Abbeville to get local versions of the story, admittedly based on hearsay, was followed by an interview with the Henry county solicitor who handled the case, and that by a talk with the victim herself. In addition, I have read reports issued by several organizations and newspaper accounts of the occurrence and its legal aftermath. I do not claim to be in possession of every fact or omniscient as to the significance of those I have, but from what I have been able to gather the following story emerges:

Around eleven o'clock on the night of September 3, 1944, Mrs. Recy Taylor, young Negro mother of a two-year-old child, was walking home from church accompanied by an older Negro woman and her son. A car passed them two or three times, then stopped. Its occupants claimed to represent the sheriff and charged Mrs. Taylor with cutting a white man in another community earlier that evening. Despite the protestations of the older woman that Mrs. Taylor had been with her throughout the day and evening, the self-styled deputies forced her into the car at the point of a gun and drove away. Instead of taking her to the sheriff, they rode in another direction for a short distance and, holding her at gun-point, six youths attacked her.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Taylor's companions enlisted the aid of a white man who lived near by, and he, with Mrs. Taylor's father, unsuccessfully sought the sheriff. In time they secured the deputy sheriff, who found Mrs. Taylor near the white man's home shortly after the boys released her. Her description of the car led to the arrest of one youth whom she identified partially by his clothing. The boy swore and denied

her allegation. He was the only suspect ever brought before her for identification. No names were mentioned in her presence during the assault, and she has been unable from the first to give any fuller aid in identifying her assailants. She is certain that the boys had a gun and that six attacked her, and she was able to describe the car, but that was all. She was not threatened or bribed not to identify. None of the boys was known to her before the crime was committed.

Investigation Requested

The first youth apprehended allegedly confessed later and implicated others, all minors, but he was released under bond the next day. In October the regular grand jury examined the case, but returned no indictments. It was then that interested groups of persons began to request the governor to investigate the whole affair. Residents of Henry county have insisted that they would have taken care of it if outsiders had let them alone. They did take care of it in their own way, but socially conscious persons are not satisfied.

Alabama law demands that a grand jury in the county where a crime is committed indict the suspect before a case can be tried. The whole matter, consequently, hinges on an initial action by the grand jury. Governor Chauncey Sparks called for a thorough investigation, which was conducted by agents of the attorney general. Their findings included facts that should have led to indictments. Attorney General McQueen divulged that one boy agreed that the woman's story was true, two denied being present, and the others insisted they had paid her. A seventh boy, younger than the others, was involved but was not accused of attack. Some Alabamans feel that such testimonies amount to confession. An occasional person tries to dismiss the whole matter by declaring it merely a commercial proposition, but few persons would seriously assert that a prostitute has to be procured at the point of a gun. Mrs. Taylor insists that none of the boys made any effort to give her money. The names of the boys are known to everybody, and many feel that they are guilty of the crime, but a second grand jury, called at the governor's request, still returned no indictments. Obviously the governor and attorney general deemed a trial in order, or they would not have asked for the second hearing.

The matter rests, then, on citizens who constitute grand juries in Henry county.

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To attain through research and action programs
the ideals and practices of equal opportunity
for all peoples in the region.

Editorial

At the annual meeting of SRC in December, 1944, the Executive Directors were instructed to look into a situation in Abbeville, Alabama, involving the rape of a Negro woman, Mrs. Recy Taylor, by several white boys.

After obtaining confidential statements from several people who were in a position to know something about this deplorable situation, we asked Mrs. Eleanor Nichols of Georgiana, Alabama, to investigate the case further and prepare a report. Mrs. Nichols' findings were published in the May 9 issue of *The Christian Century*, and through the kindness of the editors of *The Christian Century*, we reprint her article in this issue of THE SOUTHERN FRONTIER. We commend this report to the thoughtful attention of all our readers and particularly to members of SRC.

The Abbeville case stinks to high heaven. It is another copy of a familiar picture—the dominance of customs over “the equal protection of the laws,” the low value which the white community puts upon the lives and persons of Negroes, the virtual impossibility of getting a local grand jury to indict “respectable” white people who molest Negroes, and all the rest of it.

And what can be done about it? Practically nothing, apparently. The Governor of Alabama had an investigation made, but he could not make the grand jury bring an indictment. The few local citizens who have wanted to see justice done are lost in the overwhelming majority who want to forget the whole thing. The barrage of protests and petitions which came from “outside” sources, such as “The Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor,” has probably done little more than crystallize the false pride and sensitivity of the local community.

We shall continue to follow this case, and if there is anything that SRC can do to help get justice done, we shall do it.

Georgia Committee News

The Georgia Committee on Interracial Cooperation reports excellent progress. It now has approximately 500 members in 97 different towns and cities. There are active local committees in Atlanta (Fulton-DeKalb County), Macon, Augusta, and Columbus, and others are in the making.

The Georgia Committee has held no statewide meeting this year, on account of travel restrictions, but it has had two successful section meetings. The first meeting was held in Macon on April 13, the second in Atlanta on April 20. At both meetings there was discussion of post-war problems and responsibilities.

Both meetings passed a resolution calling for the equalization of public school facilities for Negroes. They also adopted a further resolution, the main points of which were:

- The right of all citizens to vote.
- Extension of the practice of using Negro police in Negro areas.
- Permission for Negro physicians to practice in city hospitals where there are Negro patients.
- Better recreational facilities for Negroes.
- Housing projects to eliminate slum areas.
- Representation of Negroes on local Veterans Assistance Committees.

South Carolina Committee

The South Carolina Committee on Interracial Cooperation has formally affiliated with SRC and will be known hereafter as The South Carolina Committee of The Southern Regional Council.

At a recent meeting the South Carolina Committee adopted the following resolution:

RESOLVED by the South Carolina Committee of the Southern Regional Council:

1. That this Committee feels that the pending college expansion bill is inequitable, in that provision made therein for the State Negro College at Orangeburg is grossly inadequate when compared with the needs of that institution and with provision made therein for the white colleges of South Carolina.

2. That the Committee further feels that the state cannot longer escape and should not longer seek to escape its obligation to provide equipment and personnel to bring the State Negro College at Orangeburg up to the scholastic level of the state colleges for white undergraduate pupils.

3. That the Committee further feels that the state is under legal and moral obligation to provide by scholarship or otherwise for graduate and professional training for those Negroes in this state who are qualified for such training and who wish to receive it.

4. That the Committee further feels that, if the college expansion bill is to become law, it should be amended so as substantially to increase the appropriation for the State Negro College.

Protest From South Carolina

In the March issue of THE SOUTHERN FRONTIER we cited from *The State*, of Columbia, South Carolina, a summary of South Carolina news during 1944 which included mention of “the formation of the state's first all-Negro party, the Progressive Democrats.”

A South Carolina subscriber takes us to task in no uncertain terms for calling this party an “all-Negro party.” This subscriber, a white woman, writes: “From its very inception the Progressive Democratic Party has been a party for all the people who certainly are not represented by the various factions in South Carolina. Our policy has ever been to create a voice for the voiceless . . . but it apparently serves the powers that be best to relegate us to a limited status and one that they presume will be derogatory and prevent the timid from affiliation, by labeling the party all-Negro.”

The editors of the FRONTIER are quite aware of the fact that the Progressive Democratic Party is open to all people, and they regret the incorrect reference to the party in the March issue.

A Good Farm Paper

Dr. Giles Hubert, head of the Department of Economics at Fisk University, at Nashville, now edits a monthly paper for small farmers. He has taken over the editorial and news space of a paper published for 17 years under the title of *The Modern Farmer*. Circulation has grown to several thousand in the eight months of the new direction. Subscription is \$1.00 a year. The paper pushes agricultural education and programs to aid the poorer farmers, Negro and white, in the South.

You Should Read

A B C's of Scapegoating. Central YMCA College, 19 South LaSalle St., Chicago, Illinois. The Council has a limited number available at 25c a copy.

Background for Brotherhood. By Kendall Weisiger. The SRC has a limited number of these available at 30c a copy.

Negro Problems Confronting Nation. A Series of Ten Articles by Barry Bishop, published in *The Dallas Morning News*, November 20-29, 1944. A limited number available from the Council on request.

Two Talks to Families of Returning Servicemen—When He Comes Back, and If He Comes Back Nervous. By Thomas A. C. Rennie and Luther W. Woodward. National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Inc., 372-374 Broadway, Albany, N. Y. 15c a copy.

“Our Conflicting Racial Policies.” By Will W. Alexander. In *Harper's Magazine*, January, 1945. SRC has reprints of this article. Single copies free on request.

The Abbeville Case—Continued

The onus is not upon the state as a whole, since the governor and the attorney general took all the action open to them. The onus is not upon individual citizens of the state, for Governor Sparks received more than one thousand communications, many of them from Alabamans, urging that he investigate the case. Many interested persons are church members, although no church has taken action as such.

The Demand for Justice

The Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor issued a pamphlet which stated, "They must be punished according to Alabama law. . . ." But it is Alabama law which has blocked the trial process. It is unfortunate that legal technicalities can protect suspected criminals, but it is not the first time this has occurred in our nation. It does not further the cause of justice to cry that the abduction of Mrs. Taylor was "nazi-like" or that the handling of the matter was fascist. It is absurd to suggest that the boys were impelled by motives of political or social philosophy. Such name-calling is more likely to block future action by recalcitrant grand juries than anything else. Mrs. Taylor stated in my presence that the deputy sheriff and the county solicitor appeared interested in having her case handled justly. The governor saw to it that a second presentation of the facts was made to the grand jury, and many individuals have registered vigorous protests. But the matter rests finally with the Henry county grand jury.

Technically, there is no discrimination against Negroes in the law itself. The discrimination which arises is a subtle, elusive force, the product of mass prejudice and a psychology which has tenacious roots in the far distant past. It is an almost unconscious, tacit agreement on the part of white persons to protect the white man involved in any case. It is virtually impossible to put a finger on it, and white people will deny its existence with sincerity, but the force is there, coloring every contact between the races. It is much harder to combat than outright discrimination in the law would be, but it is discrimination, nonetheless.

Racial Discrimination

If anyone doubts that there has been discrimination in the Abbeville case, let him compare it with the Scottsboro case. In the former, a Negro mother, living with her husband, her character vouched for by Negroes and whites, was attacked on the way home from church by six white youths. In the latter, white prostitutes were assaulted by a group of Negro youths. No one can deny that the state of Alabama prosecuted the Scottsboro case with the greatest vigor. Had Mrs. Taylor been a white attacked by whites, or a white attacked by Negroes, the assault would have had a far different sequel.

The best procedure for concerned persons to follow would be to reveal their

interest to the governor, at Montgomery, Alabama, and request that he reopen the case. Enough pressure of public opinion would doubtless bring about this action, for it was public opinion that led the governor to his former attempt to secure justice for Mrs. Taylor. Further insistence on the part of the governor would surely persuade the citizens of Henry county that indictments are demanded. Should Alabamans, and particularly residents of Henry county, still prove intent on letting the matter drift into oblivion, they would then no longer have any valid objection to outside agitation. Such outside concern would be warranted and desirable, for this case should be considered justly, because it is symptomatic of a fundamental weakness in our democracy, a spot of decay which may infect our whole democratic structure.

Alabama is but a minute segment of the world or even of the nation, and if the Abbeville case had no significance beyond the boundaries of the state it would not deserve national attention. Actually its implications reach into many phases of human life and around the whole globe. For one thing, it has a bearing on the problem of juvenile delinquency. The danger in allowing the perpetrators of such a crime to go unpunished is not to be ignored. Judged even from the standpoint of selfish white interests there is danger, for unchecked criminality among Negroes and against Negroes may in time spill over into white society. If womanhood is to be revered and protected in one group of citizens, it must be in all, or the protection will prove exceedingly flimsy.

The most far-reaching and important implication of this case, however, is its bearing on the whole tremendous question of the survival of democracy. Millions of our men, black and white, are engaged in battling a force which says some men are born to be masters, some to be slaves, some to hold in their hands the destinies of beings of other blood. We abhor this philosophy; we condemn nazi treatment of subject peoples and of the Jews. We think of ourselves as the champions of Christian democracy, the supporters of the "common man." But we cannot be champions of democracy so long as there is one whit of discrimination against any minority group in this country. Our protestations will be an echoing mockery.

There is a story which tells that when a mortally wounded American Negro lay dying on some Pacific island he asked a buddy to inscribe on the marker over his grave the words: "Here lies a black man who died fighting the yellow man for the freedom of the white man." Freedom is doomed to short and bitter existence unless it is freedom for all mankind. A democracy in which a wronged individual is unable to secure justice because of his color cannot speak compellingly to the subject peoples of Europe and Asia, nor can it justify the death of thousands of its sons on the battlefield.

Freight Rates and Southern Industrial Growth

EDGAR WATKINS

Excerpts from an address delivered at SRC's Conference on The South's Post-War Economy, Atlanta, April 12.

The producer, the manufacturer, the entrepreneur, and the consumer, are all interested in the cost of transportation. If this cost is higher than the added place value, there will be no transportation; and, if this cost is less from one place than another, the lower-cost place will be preferred for production, manufacturing and selling, if it is too high, consumption will decrease.

The South, like little Jack Horner, sat in a corner largely indifferent to this law, pulled out a plum labeled "state rights," and said, "How great am I!" The South had, and has, large natural resources of minerals, timber and water power, much fertile soil, an equitable climate, and pleasing "aspects of nature." Other parts of our nation, conspicuously the Northeastern part, having received a more niggardly treatment from nature, were driven to manufacturing, using therefor the South's resources. To utilize these resources required low freight rates from the South, and to discourage the South from manufacturing her resources, the North needed and obtained lower rates on its finished goods than were accorded to such goods when manufactured in the South.

Within the last twenty years, some individual shippers sought to remedy the situation as to themselves. The textile industry obtained a mitigation of its handicap, but there still remains a freight charge discrimination of 10 per cent. Cement and lime shippers and a few others obtained parity.

About 1934, the Southeastern Governors began a discussion of the situation, and in 1937, under the leadership of the Honorable Bibb Graves, then Governor of Alabama, complaint was brought which resulted in a parity of rates on a limited number of commodities.

In 1944, Governor Ellis Arnall, tired of the long delays in giving Georgia her rights, brought a suit in the Supreme Court of the United States, designed to end the delays. The Supreme Court, on March 26, 1945, permitted this suit to be filed. While only one State is a party to this suit, all the states against which there is unjust discrimination will be helped by a favorable decision.

Extent of Discrimination

The amount of the discrimination against the South is based upon a general scale of rates which are about 39 per cent higher in the South than in the North, or Official, territory.

Some rates from the South, generally on commodities which are not produced or grown in the North, had lower rates than rates in the North. A fair statement of the weighted average of the South's discrimination
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Political Factors in Economic Progress

GLENN RAINEY
Georgia School of Technology

Extracts from an address at SRC's Conference on The South's Post-War Economy, Atlanta, April 12.

There is no clear line of distinction between government and economics. In fact, the basis of government is economics. So that this is not a question of economics and government, but fundamentally a question of central control and economic stability.

If we are going to have full employment and a fair distribution of the national income, we must have a government which is responsible to the people and not merely to a selfish majority.

Here in the South it is our business to fight race prejudice and hatred frontally; and it is our business to see to it that reactionary money from outside northern capitalists shall not continue to be used in victimizing us by electing for us senators and representatives in Washington who play one race against the other.

Because the South has been so often led away from seeking what was rightly its own, it must be peculiarly alert against demagogues, in whatever guise, talking the language of popular prejudices in order to deliver the people into the bondage of predatory interests.

Freight Rates—Continued

ination is that it is about 20 per cent higher than the Northern rates.

The Northern shippers claim that if they did not get lower rates than the South, natural advantages possessed by the South would destroy the manufacturing industry in the North.

Some Southern shippers, as stated above, on certain raw materials not competitive with the North, get lower rates than in the North. These two classes of shippers fear any change in rates, and generally they have sought to put brakes on the efforts of the South and West to obtain a parity.

No fairminded person, free from the predilections of self-interest and geography, can fail to reach the conclusion that ours is a nation, that our railroad system should be national in its treatment of the public, and that justice requires, in general, a parity of rates throughout the country.

That justice which will follow rate parity will injure neither shippers nor carriers in either the North, West or South. Thereby the growth of industry will be accelerated, and the chances of unemployment will be lessened in these formerly handicapped sections, thus adding prosperous consumers for the products of the now favored sections and increasing the amount of traffic the railroad systems will haul. The elimination of world trade barriers, for which we all hope, will be accompanied by the elimination of such barriers in our own country.

The South's Post-War Housing Problem

COLEMAN WOODBURY
Assistant Administrator
National Housing Agency

Excerpts from an address delivered at SRC's Conference on The South's Post-War Economy, Atlanta, April 12.

We have made a preliminary estimate of the need for housing construction in this country after the war. These are non-farm figures, limited to urban and rural non-farm areas. We have estimated that for the first decade after the close of the war, we will need in this country 12,600,000 additional family dwelling units—an average building rate of a million and a quarter units per year.

Just to give you some comparison of that figure with past experience: the largest single construction year on non-farm housing in the history of this country was 1925 in which we built 937,000 units. We are talking about a post-war average, for the first decade, a third greater than the highest single year in the history of the country.

South's Needs

We have also made a total need estimate for the South, taking the 13 state area that is represented by this Council. We have not previously published these figures, and they are subject to further study and revision.

In these thirteen states there were almost exactly 20 per cent of the nation's non-farm dwelling units in 1940. That may serve as a general scale to give you some idea of the proportions. But our need estimate placed about 3,700,000 out of the 12,600,000 in these thirteen states, and that is almost exactly thirty per cent of the total. In other words, according to our estimates, about half again as much of the new housing may be in the South, as the South had of the total non-farm housing supply in 1940.

And interestingly enough, instead of having a fifty-fifty break or division between new need and replacement need, the 3,700,000 units in the South divide into 1,600,000 units of new need and 2,100,000 for replacement need. In other words, replacement is heavier, larger in proportion to the total, according to our estimates, in the South than it is for the nation as a whole.

How much of that need we meet depends to some extent upon the Federal Government, to be sure, but to a much greater extent upon the local communities, builders, lending institutions and local housing authorities.

Analysis of Cost

We are very much interested in technical advance in house building and operation. The NHA has made a housing cost study

from records of the FHA, the Federal Trade Commission and others, of a \$5,000 house. We broke down its production cost, and we found that for each dollar of cost of the finished product, 46 cents went for materials; and of that 46 cents, 21 cents was the cost of the materials as they left the plant; and 25 cents was the cost of distribution, transportation and various profits. We found that 30 cents went to labor on the site, 12 cents for profit and overhead of general contractors and subcontractors, and about 12 cents for land and land improvements.

We then took that house and computed the monthly cost to own. It included, of course, interest, amortization, taxes, insurance, and an allowance for maintenance and repairs. And then just to show the relative proportions of these various factors of monthly cost, we figured a twenty per cent reduction of each—not that we thought a 20 per cent could be or should be attained in each, but just to show their relative importance in the monthly cost to own. And we found that a 20 per cent reduction in interest rate from the 5 per cent we had assumed, made a reduction of 5.4 per cent in the monthly cost to own; 20 per cent reduction in the amortization payments reduced the monthly cost only 4.5 per cent; twenty per cent reduction in taxes produced a monthly reduction of 4.4 per cent; 20 per cent reduction in maintenance and repairs made a 3.5 per cent reduction in monthly cost; 20 per cent reduction in capital cost of the house made a reduction of 16.4 per cent in the monthly cost to own during the period of loan payment and 11.9 per cent thereafter. I think that makes a pretty conclusive case for the desirability of all feasible reductions in the capital cost of housing.

Looking Ahead

These are the things that seem to us to constitute the chief phases of an effective attack upon housing in the post-war world: (a) a clear realization of its importance and size, (b) the development of a system of local market analysis to bring the facts home so the people can do something about them, (c) certain revisions and expansion of the forms of Federal aid, (d) an urban redevelopment program that will make land available somewhere near its annual use cost for housing and other purposes, (e) some programs of Federal assistance, largely in the form of clearing house activities, to encourage conservation of middle-aged areas, and (f) research programs, the result of which will be made available to the house building industry in all its branches and, I hope, to housing consumers.